

# Report

# Vicksburg National Military Park

## ■ 1.0 Site Description

Vicksburg National Military Park, located in southern Mississippi, was established in February 1899 to commemorate the 1863 Civil War battle at Vicksburg. The capture of Vicksburg, which sits on the bank of the commercially vibrant Mississippi River, was a key military objective of the Union Army. Once accomplished, it gave the Union full control of the River. The Park exists as a memorial to the soldiers and civilians that suffered tragedy of war to help shape today's nation.

The Park includes several battle sites and 1,300 monuments. One of the key features of the Park includes a 16-mile-long tour road that connects the 15 major tour spots, monuments, museums and Visitor Center. Another key feature is the USS Cairo, an historic, shallow draft Union gunboat that has been restored to its original condition, and its adjacent museum of naval artifacts. Other sites include the Visitor Center featuring films and displays, the Vicksburg National Cemetery, including 18,000 graves from several wars, and antebellum homes and antique shops.

The annual visitation level is estimated at 950,000, with the highest visitation levels occurring from April to July. No particular day of the week is the busiest, because most visitors are not from the local area. The Park is seen as a destination in and of itself, with a majority of the visitors staying in the nearby town of Vicksburg. Generally visitors spend two to three hours in the Park, but a comprehensive visit requires a minimum of eight to 16 hours.

Visitors may access the Park from I-20 or I-55 either via personal automobiles, private tour buses or bicycles. The adjacent town of Vicksburg (population of 40,000) hosts a collection of inns, lodging, retail shops and restaurants. The nearest airport is located 50 miles to the east in Jackson, Mississippi.

The largest percentage of visitors tour the Park via personal vehicles. Audio tour tapes may be rented from the Park to provide a self-guided tour. Another large group of visitors see the Park as part of a tour. Tour guides, licensed by the Park, often lead groups of people via personal automobile or bus. Tour guides charge \$20 for the tours conducted via automobile and \$40 for tours conducted via bus. The automobiles and buses must be provided by the group, as the Park does not supply any vehicles.

Some visitors access the Park via bicycles. Generally the one-way roadways throughout the Park are adequate and safe for bicyclists to use for travel in conjunction with automobiles. No separate bicycle trail system exists in the Park. Limited camping facilities and trails are available for Scout groups, though not for the public.

Parking is provided at the Visitor Center parking lot (for 50 vehicles) and at various sites, museums and “pull-offs” throughout the Park. Generally, the supply of parking spaces is adequate to meet the demand in the Park. However, during peak times, additional parking especially at the Visitor Center is needed along the roadways. Rangers help direct this activity.

The General Management Plan (GMP) is approximately 20 years old and therefore out of date. Many of the conditions have changed dramatically in that time, such as visitation levels and congestion.

## ■ 2.0 Existing ATS

No Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) currently exist in the Park, or provide access to the Park from the outside.

## ■ 3.0 ATS Needs

Traffic congestion is one of the Park’s biggest problems. Because there is one main road that passes by the key sites, museums and centers (the 16-mile road), a long line of cars and buses snake through the Park in a single-file fashion. Invariably some vehicles travel at a slower pace, causing bottlenecks at the sites. Congestion is most a problem in the peak months of April and May. However, due to limited space for expansion, the proximity of the roadway to the adjacent historic sites and the hilly terrain, options for mitigating this problem are limited.

During peak times, the congestion described above extends to the entrance of the Park as well. A long queue often forms as visitors pull into the entrance station to pay Park entrance fees. This queue of incoming visitors often extends outside the Park and clogs the signaled intersection of Clay and Baldwin in the town of Vicksburg, thereby also causing congestion in the town. The Park is currently working on how to redesign the entrance station and adjacent road to improve this problem. It may include creating two lanes for entrance – one for permit holders and one for one-time visitors.

The State of Kentucky is the last of the original 28 states to construct a monument within the Park. The state is currently working on plans and funding for this monument. However the site selected is not served by any existing roads within the Park. The NPS will be responsible for constructing the road to this monument, which will likely occur in a couple of years.

At this time, Park staff express no critical need for ATS and do not feel that they can effectively address the problems documented above.

## ■ 4.0 Basis of ATS Needs

Park staff do not view ATS as an effective method of addressing documented congestive problems.

## ■ 5.0 Bibliography

Facsimile Transmission from William O. Nichols, Superintendent. November 19, 1999.

Vicksburg National Military Park. Internet site: <http://www.nps.gov/vick/>. Information printed November 17, 1999.

## ■ 6.0 Persons Interviewed

William O. Nichols, Superintendent. Telephone Interview. November 17, 1999